Charles Santorelli
interviewed by Jaime Lopez and Paul Vance

Jaime: Okay. Okay. You can start by telling us your name and your job title.

Charles S.: Okay. My name is Charles Santorelli. I'm a journeyman electrician in Local Union Number 3, New York City.

Jaime: What division is that? The division?

Charles S.: The A construction division.

Jaime: Hmm-hmm(affirmative). Charlie, can you tell us a little bit about your background, where you were born, [00:00:30] where your parents are from and where you live now?

Charles S.: Okay. I'm born and raised in Queens and I still reside in Queens. I was born in Astoria, New York at a very young age. I stayed in Queens. I now currently reside in Bayside, still in Queens. My mother was born in Palermo, Sicily and immigrated to this country when she was two in 1913. [00:01:00] My father was born in this country, but his parents were born in Naples, New York and they lived in under 17th Street and Pleasant Avenue in Harlem. That's where they grew up. My mother grew up, I guess they lived in Queens also for most of their lives.

Jaime: Okay. What are some of your hobbies, Charlie?

Charles S.: Some of my hobbies are I like skiing. I [00:01:30] like motorcycle riding. I like hunting and fishing. I guess and [inaudible], and yacht racing, sail boating and yacht racing. I've been doing that for many years.

Jaime: Very nice.

Paul: How'd you get involved in yacht racing?

Charles S.: That's a good question. I just, I grew up around boats. My brother always had, was a power boater. I [00:02:00] always wanted to do sailing. I happened to take a sailing class. I got married. We took a sailing class in City Island in the Bronx, a one week sailing class. Then I had a boat. I bought a power boat. Met a guy with a sailboat and he asked me to go sailing with him. I had taken the sailing class already and then we started sailing together and racing. [00:02:30] We've gotten, been doing a lot of racing for probably over 30 years now, maybe more in racing.

I've been invited to Bermuda in an invitational race down in, the Bermudians would invite us to Bermuda, a team. You'd bring your sails and one design boat. We were racing on J24's, so you would bring your sails to Bermuda. They would give you the boat and then they'd have international race week. They would invite 500 people to

Bermuda, put you up in their homes. [00:03:00] Have parties every day and we'd race every day. It was a regatta. I did that for about ten years. Every year that they would invite us back there. I made some buddies. I made friends with the Canadian team. I raced with the Canadian team for a number of years, raced with American teams. It was a lot of fun.

Paul: Yeah, sounds beautiful.

Charles S.: Raced on Maxi boats, like the World Cup, various cup boats were based off Maxi boats. I did [00:03:30] a Maxi boat Worlds one year with some friends. That was pretty cool.

Jaime: Charlie, I know your hobbies are a big part of your life, but I would like to speak to you about your work life. How did you become an electrician?

Charles S.: I come from a family of plumbers. My father was a plumber. My brother was a plumber. I was going to college, Queensborough [00:04:00] Community College, when I got out of high school. I was taking up mechanical technology. It was an interesting ... it was interesting, but I asked the teacher in the class, "When I graduate with an associate's degree with this degree, what would I expect to do and how much would I expect to earn?" He said, "Oh, well, you'll be doing drafting or you'll be doing some little design sketches and stuff [00:04:30] for the job. You'll be making about 7 to $8,000 a year." I said, "Oh, okay, thank you." I didn't realize what that meant at the time.

Then I had a family reunion in Pennsylvania that weekend or within the next couple of weeks after that and I was down there with my brother, who was a journeyman plumber. I had asked him, "How much do you make a year? He says, "I work seven hours a day. We don't usually work much overtime and I make about 16,000." [00:05:00] I had said to him, "I want to be a plumber." He says, "Oh, if you want to work in construction, you don't want to be a plumber." I said, "No, I want to be a plumber. You're a plumber. Daddy was a plumber and I want to be a plumber." He says, "If you want to work in construction, you want to be an electrician." He goes, "They're the first guys on the job. They're the last guys on the job and they never have unemployment." Where traditionally in the construction trades, there's seasonal [00:05:30] work and there's unemployment, so in the past up to that point, the electricians mostly had full employment at all times.

I applied for, there was an ad on the television. The IBEW Local 3 was hiring electricians. I'm going to say probably 1,200 in the ... They took 500 in July of 1972 with my class and they took 500, [00:06:00] I believe it was in January, so that's 1,000 in just 1972. I think they gave out 6,500 applications. If you wrote a letter to request an application, they would give you an application. You would fill it out and then send it in. Then everybody took an aptitude test, a written test and a manual dexterity test.

[00:06:30] I believe the reason I got into Local 3 was because of my building trades background because after you took the test, you had to write an essay why you wanted to be an electrician. Most of the guys in my neighborhood all went for this because everybody knew that the electricians had made a decent living and it was a good trade

and it was a good job. A lot of people [00:07:00] filed for this application and had to write that essay, so who had college professors help them and who had guys from the phone company help them and this or that.

My brother, who actually didn't graduate high school, he went to Queens Vocational High School. He sat down with me and he told me that the reasons that the people that were going to interview me, half of them would be electricians and the other half would be contractors. We would say that [00:07:30] you don't mind getting your hands dirty. You like working with your hands. You come from a union background. My mother was in ILGWU, International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, worker from 16 to 65. She worked for Ivy Pleating, Victor and Irving Mertz. It was a sweatshop. If you ever saw the way they worked, just all they'd have is fans, electric [00:08:00] big floor fans, no air conditioning, windows that open. She worked on 38th Street and 8th Avenue from 16 to 65.

Those people were like friends. She worked with them for so long. On the holidays, they would come over to have coffee and cake or to have a meal with us. It was funny because I never saw anybody with blue hair and this Jewish woman, Bertha, had blue gray hair. [00:08:30] They were very friendly though, the Jewish and the Italians. They got along very well. I think there was a lot of similarities with the ... their backgrounds were family oriented and what not. That's basically how I got into being an electrician.

I went to the interview, spoke, told them about how I had a family that was in the building trades, family members in the building trades, union background, we're strong union family and household and how I didn't mind getting dirty and I didn't mind [00:09:00] taking orders and learning the business and was conscientious and that was it. I was the first generation Local 3 electrician.

Jaime: Do you have any other family in the business now?

Charles S.: I do. I have a nephew in the business. His name is John Santorelli. He works for Unity Electric. He's a very successful foreman with Unity. He's been with them for a lot of years. My brother's son, who happened to [00:09:30] become a plumber, is now the assistant business manager of Local 1.

Jaime: No way.

Charles S.: Yeah. United Association of Plumbers and Fitters and Pipe Fitters, yeah, in New York City, yeah.

Jaime: That's amazing and you're-

Charles S.: I think my father would be very proud. My brother and my father are no longer on the planet, but he saw his son become a very successful business agent, which is phenomenal. Then my father, I think, knowing that his [00:10:00] grandson is the assistant business manager, in line to be the business manager position. You never

know how that works, but he's the number two guy in the five boroughs for the United Association of Plumbers. We're all proud of him for that. He's very successful.

Jaime: Charlie, do you remember your first day in the business? First day on the job site?

Charles S.: I do.

Jaime: Can you explain [00:10:30] what happened, who'd you meet, anything special come up? Can you remember anything special about that day?

Charles S.: Well, it's funny because it was a little, there was a lot ... Back in the day, in 1972, first I went to Cathedral High School was my first job. It was First Avenue and 50 ... I don't know, 58th Street, 57th Street, something. It was called Cathedral High. I think since the name has changed. You [00:11:00] show up. It was for Lord Electric. There had to be 300 men on the job. You show up and they go, "All right. Go in that room over there" and there's a little, there's benches and hooks you can put your coat on. You change your clothes. They put me with a [giant 00:11:17] and the first day on the job, they said, "Okay, go up there and splice, twist those wires together." All right. I had never really had much of an interest in electric. I always had a lot of respect for it and we knew that you didn't want [00:11:30] to play around with it when you were near water.

I went up with my brand new pliers and I went up on the ladder. I twisted the wires left, counter clockwise. He says, "Oh no, you don't do that. You have to twist them clockwise because we're going to put a wire nut on and that's it." That was my first day. We're going to be doing, at that time, I think we were doing three quarter, one inch pipe. You had to bend it [00:12:00] with a Chicago bender. It was all galvanized or aluminum and they teach you. Right from that first day, they taught us how to do.

Jaime: Probably some of the people that are going to be listening to this interview are not going to know what a Chicago bender is.

Charles S.: Okay.

Jaime: Can you explain what a Chicago bender is? How it looks like?

Charles S.: Okay. Well, a Chicago bender is a ... when you bend pipe, the radius of the pipe has to be no less than six [00:12:30] times the diameter of the pipe, so a one inch pipe inside diameter would have to have a six inch radius. There's a machine that has shoes that the pipe fit in that you would put it in straight and you would click. There's a ratchet handle. We put a piece of pipe as a handle for leverage and you would bend this, click this pipe. It's geared down, so it's not that hard to do. It would bend the pipe. You could bend the pipe segment bender. You could bend the 30 degree bend, the 45 bend or [00:13:00] you can make a 90 degree bend. That's what these guys were teaching us, these journeymen were teaching us how to do.

Paul: That's the specifics of twisting the wire left?

Charles S.: No, that was it.

Paul: Left or right?

Charles S.: I twisted the wire left. They probably giggled a little bit. "Look he twisted it lefty." He says, "We don't do that. We twist it righty." So I went and [00:13:30] I twisted it righty and then I've been twisting it righty ever since.

Paul : Because of the ...

Charles S.: Well, it's righty tighty, lefty loosey.

Paul: Oh, okay.

Charles S.: So the wire nut goes on clockwise. If you twisted the wire counterclockwise as the wire nut that you screwed onto the spliced wire, the solid wire that spliced, you would be loosening it and it would have less of a tight electrical connection than twisting it clockwise.

Paul: [00:14:00] You had no prior knowledge before you got into the apprenticeship, how to do electrical work. What jobs did you have?

Charles S.: Yeah. I worked as an auto mechanic after. I worked a little bit as an auto mechanic while I was in college. We were doing brake jobs. We worked on our own cars. We were racing cars back then. We raced cars. We'd do racing on the street, racing at the tracks. I was always a Chevy guy. [00:14:30] We would have to learn electrical just by a necessity of making your car work. I never thought about it like that, like this would be my career, but I didn't really have any electrical house wiring experience or anything like that, just wiring on cars.

Paul : That helps, right?

Charles S.: Yeah, it didn't hurt. I just think that working on cars, you had the ability to almost [00:15:00] practice with dexterity, right, because you're putting nuts and bolts together, you're turning hand around to go in a spot that's tight. You got your left hand. I'm kind of ambidextrous because I can do pretty much the same with both hands. Most people can't. I would almost practice with my left hand sometimes just to, in case you have to use your left hand. Like the way your hands are shaped, sometimes you have to do that.

Paul: How old were you when you were working on cars?

Charles S.: Well, I started at 14 [00:15:30] because my brother was always, my brother was 12 years old than me. He was racing cars and he was always a Chevy guy, so then I looked up ... My father died when I was very young, 13 years old my father died, so he was like a male role model for me, I think, growing up. He would be racing cars and we'd go to the racetrack with him and stuff like that. That was like what I aspired to do. I would say working on cars and working with tools. There was always tools. My father [00:16:00]

was a plumber. My brother was a plumber, so he was always changing faucets and changing washers and fixing, doing plumbing in somebody's house, in the family members, my grandmother and I would always be there learning and helping them do whatever they needed to do. I think that my manual dexterity was very good. I was always really, pretty good with my hands when doing things.

Paul: You were always tinkering so ...

Charles S.: Pardon me?

Paul: [00:16:30] It sounds like you were always tinkering.

Charles S.: Yeah, tinkering. I did wood working. We did wood working in shop. I remember wood working in shop. We always did well. Even in metal shop, when I was in junior high school, I did very good in metal shop, did very good in wood working shop. We made little different things and shovels and we made little name plates and whatever we made, a square. I remember we made a t-square out of metal. Yeah and I guess I just aspired [00:17:00] to what we do today.

Jaime: Charlie, could you tell me about your jobs nowadays, this training, what you've been doing over the years?

Charles S.: Well, I'm doing this 45 years, so that's a long career. I would say that in my first, my apprenticeship and stuff and [inaudible 00:17:19] was mostly working in interiors of office buildings, building risers. We built Memorial Hospital was a big project during the elevator strike. Hospital [00:17:30] floors are bigger than normal floors so we were working on the roof. We had to climb up 20 floors a couple of times a day to do work. A lot of out of towners in at that time. They were from the south and the west because the city was booming. We'd have these out of towners that'd be working on the jobs, all southern accents and stuff. That's mostly office work, building office buildings. I did that for years. Then when I got out of, went through that whole [00:18:00] apprentice doing that, worked at Rockefeller Center.

Jaime: Okay, before you go further, can you tell us a little bit about these other out of towners because I've never been able to work with an out of towner and I know that there are amazing stories about these relationships with these guys? Is there anyone that stands out to you?

Charles S.: Yeah. This was great. I'm going to tell you, I remember the guy's name. The guy's name was Cecil E. McMinnis. It was probably Edward or Edwin or something. Cecil E. McMinnis was from down in Alabama somewhere. Before, I [00:18:30] was working with him. We were bending two inch aluminum conduit, ridged conduit and he had to make a saddle, a three point saddle. What that is is if you had to go over something say five inches high, you'd have to make a 30 degree angle, then a bend over whatever the obstruction was, like a 60 degree angle and then another 30 degree angle. Making like almost a little bridge, we call it a saddle. He said to me ... I said, "Oh man, [00:19:00] I really want to learn ... " When I got into the business, I was a very conscientious guy. I

wanted to learn. If I saw somebody doing something I wanted to know what that guy was doing, how do you do it, I wanted to learn how to do that. All right?

I go to lunch at ten to 12. We go wash up and put our stuff away and come back at 12:30 and the saddle's done. I said, "Cecil, how did you make that?" He goes, "Yeah, I'll show you how to make [00:19:30] that, the next one, I'll show you how to make it." I knew how to make an offset. I knew how to make a 90. I knew how to do some stuff, but the saddle is a, listen it wasn't tricky, but I think the guys back then, they didn't want to show you what they knew. It was like a secret. The out of towners were always traditionally big pipe guys. They would bend the pipe and they didn't want to share those secrets, their knowledge of how they did it.

I always remembered that, [00:20:00] that I don't want to use the language that I would probably like to use to tell you what I thought of that guy.

Jaime: How has that changed, that holding of knowledge?

Charles S.: I would say that traditionally ... there was another guy who was a Local 3 guy, a foreman. I'll leave his name out of it. I remember his name. He was a working foreman when I was working at Rockefeller Center and we would go around ... [the Shanty 00:20:29] [00:20:30] was in Rock Center. The boss, suit and tie, the general foreman there, suit and tie guy. He'd go around and get work from all these different clients at all of Rock Center. Then we'd go there and do the little ... it's almost like little jobbing. We had to run a three-way switch in 30 Rock in Rockefeller's office, so we ran the three-wire cable from point A to point B, cut it into the switch. I said to him, "Wow, Lester", I go, "I really want to [00:21:00] see how you wire that." He goes, "Okay." I come back from lunch and the three-way switch is installed. That's the two times in my life that that happened to me. He's another guy. "I'll show you how to do it the next time." I'm still waiting for Lester to show me how to wire a three-way switch.

It's funny. I would say that, but traditionally [00:21:30] that and the way I am in particular, I would never hold back knowledge from a journeyman or an apprentice especially to try to teach them how to do work in the workman like manner and to make it look like it's, like that's what we're proud of doing. Look at the way we install that job. Everything plumb and level. The pipes done cleanly and nice and neat and perfect, so when somebody looks at that and say, "Wow, look at that workmanship." [00:22:00] Traditionally, after that, I would say that 99% of the people would share their knowledge and that's ...

Paul: In your apprenticeship, did you have to take pipe bending classes to teach you or was there anything?

Charles S.: There was none of that. I'm going to say, you know what, I think there was at fourth year and they had pipe bending in the school [00:22:30] that you would take for a week or so. You had to sign up for that. By that point, I already knew how to bend pipe. It was basic pipe bending for those who didn't know how to do it. I never really took the pipe bending class. It's just the guys that we worked with.

Paul: You basically just learned most of your trade on the job?

Charles S.: I would say that in the pipe bending, for the most part, I would say that I was taught by journeymen that knew how to do it and I would work with them. [00:23:00] We would, back in the day, we would segment bend pipe. You would decide when you were going to make a 90, the first 90, let's say on the two inch pipe would have a 12 inch radius. The you'd add an inch. Now the next pipe would be a 13 inch radius and then the next pipe, let's say it was a two inch pipe, so it's two and a half inches, the 17 inch radius.

We were doing it by hand, hand [00:23:30] manually pumped, no one shot benders like they have today, manually pumped. You'd put 30 lines on the pipe. There was a mathematical calculation of how you would figure out what the spacing between the lines were and what the degrees were. You know, three degrees. You have a little shoe. You'd make three degrees. You'd move the bend and make three degrees a little. It was, it's done a lot quicker today, but it looked great and you'd be surprised, we got a lot of pipe in. [00:24:00] I learned that from these men and they had little books and little notes and little ... I still have the book home. There was a guy, a southern guy who, for $2, it was like they made it in his garage. It was like a stapled together book of Jacob, whatever the guy's name was pipe bending. It'd show you the guy kneeling on the floors, a picture of the guy kneeling on the floor with a hydraulic pipe bender. Then you go through there. He had tables. There were tables of how you do it and [00:24:30] you read the stuff.

I put a lot of effort into the business. There's another book that was always a fascinating book to me was Rosenberg's Book of Motors. You'd open that book up and then we'd open up again, so it was like ... If you wanted to do motors, it was like a maroon leather bound book. It opened up and then both sides opened up again. I was on the job and this guy says, "Oh, you know, you seem [00:25:00] like you like motors and controls and stuff." I says, "Yeah, because that looks like stuff I like to learn. Well, gee, coils. Wow. How does a coil, what's a coil do? Wow! Oh, it holds the circuit on that overload heaters. They get into all that motor control stuff. That was really stuff that I could sink my teeth into.

They said, "Oh, you've got to get Rosenberg's Book of Motors, so you didn't go online. You couldn't, there was no internet. You'd go to a Barnes and Noble or McGraw [00:25:30] Hill and you ordered Rosenberg's Book of Motors. I still have that book.

Jaime: Have you opened it up recently?

Charles S.: I have not. I have not. You know what, I can always, because now you know most of the stuff that you have, that again, that it's about. If we needed to though, it's a reference, but I always, the books that I've acquired over the years are [00:26:00] still, they become part of you, I think.

Jaime: Charlie, I cut you off. I'm sorry.

Charles S.: Yeah. No, I'm sorry.

Jaime: On the out of towners, but can you continue on in your career? How'd you transition from an apprenticeship through a young journeyman and throughout, the type of works that you've done and what sticks out the most?

Charles S.: Yeah, well, as an apprentice in general, we worked, like I said, we worked in Rock Center. We worked in new office buildings. We did some renovation work. Worked in the Empire State Building, [00:26:30] was fascinating to me. Wow, look at that. We put antennas and generators in the Empire State Building for the Channel 2 News. Big copper pipes, a three inch copper pipe with a one inch copper pipe inside. We had to cut them and if it was all there, it was like they were antenna signals. Then you find out, oh, don't be, if the antenna's on, there's radiation. You've got to be careful with that. We did that antennas and generators and I always liked generators.

[00:27:00] Then when I ... There were all these different classes. I turn MIJ and a guy says to me, these two guys John Barale and George Weir, we went to school together. We were in class together through our apprenticeship. They said, "Listen, Con Edison in Astoria, there's going to millions of dollars worth of work. They need welders. Let's go get and become city certified welders." Listen, my brother was a plumber. He always [00:27:30] had welding stuff. I said, "Gee, I worked on cars. It'd be great. It's another skill, so let's go take a class." We go to Ralph McGee High School in Staten Island to take this welding class.

Now this had to be 1976, 77, right? Around there. We go to Ralph McGee High School. There's 20 people in there and this is the first time in my life there was a man in that class, I'm going to say a young man in that class who could [00:28:00] not read or write. I think he was from the south because the guy would say, "Fill out the paperwork." The guy couldn't do it. He'd say, "Look, we do an hour of theory and then we go and weld", because it's, they give you a little bit of theory about the background of joining metal and stuff, metallurgy and then you go. Well, the guy couldn't read. I never in my life before or since saw somebody that couldn't read. That guy could not read and write.

He was a black gentleman and ain't nobody ever taught him how to read. They're from the south. [00:28:30] It was terrible. I took that class for about two months. All right. I had 20/20 vision. I was in perfect health and I'd walk out of there your eyeballs were like, you'd see like if somebody took a picture, like a flashbulb in your eyes. Then I'd go home to take a shower and black stuff was coming out of my nose, so you start doing research and you found out welders get Parkinson's disease. Welders don't live long. All that flocks and smoke and stuff that is going on is really not that good for you. [00:29:00] My career in welding, I can still hold a bead. I can still do what I got to do, but I dropped out of the welding class and I opted to go into the telephone division.

There was big work going on in telephone. In 72, Local 3 took in some telephone men from New York Tel and AT&T and brought them in as A journeymen. When I was working in Rockefeller Center, I saw these guys doing telephone work. [00:29:30] Electrical I never really had an interest in, but telephones I always had an interest in, for some reason the phones. Maybe it was the way they looked, the old wooden phones. Always interested in that, so I said, "I'm going to take that telephone class."

To fast forward, I took the class and then I go out. I go to work for IPC, Interconnect Planning Corporation. I worked over there. I went over there with them. There were 40 men in the shop. That shop went to hundreds of men and I stayed [00:30:00] with them probably 15, 16 years. Went to all their schools, learned PBX work, learned turrets, trading turrets. Was really, mastered that whole industry, the telephone communication industry. Was fortunate enough to work with highly talented telephone men that came out of the Bell system, that had Bell system practices [00:30:30] that were a lot like me that ... Bell Telephone was a strange operation because they, Bell built stuff that lasted forever. Because they didn't have to repair it, if they didn't have to repair it, it didn't cost them anything, so they built stuff. All the equipment that they built through Western Electric was stuff that never broke or rarely broke. You rented phones and then the phone company [00:31:00] had to come and fix it for free, if you had a bad cord or the bell didn't ring.

It was fascinating how these standards were. They had the Bell system standards. How you run a wire to the house, how you do this well, everything was a standard and it was real interesting. I was fortunate enough to work with guys that were masters in that field and I picked up all those skills from them. I did that for a lot of years and then when [inaudible 00:31:27] ... [00:31:30] I did that for 15 years and I did major ... I was a foreman for them. When I got out of my [inaudible 00:31:35], I was a working foreman, installing phone systems. We installed hundreds and hundreds of systems, mostly the financial community, Goldman Sachs, Smith Barney, Lehman Brothers, Kidder, Peabody. All the big trading houses, we put phones in there and it was great. We made a lot of money, [00:32:00] made a lot of money for the company and it was interesting work.

I did that for a bunch of years then the company got sold. Then the superintendent got let go and I got let go. I was running their Connecticut operations, doing some work, but laying out jobs because a lot of the trading companies moved to Stamford and moved to Greenwich in Connecticut and I was running those projects up there. Then at that point, they didn't need my services, [00:32:30] so I left and I went to an electrical contractor, maintaining phones in the World Financial Center. Did that for another couple of years, maybe eight, for Petrocelli Electric. We were working with Hitachi systems and recording equipment and we still did that, but we also get back into the electrical side, which we did electrical and telephone, so I was kind of in charge of, as a foreman, in charge of the phone systems there. We had PBX's there and we had turrets, trading turrets, Hitachi [00:33:00] turrets.

Jaime: Can you explain what PBX's are and turrets?

Charles S.: Oh, yeah. Yeah, that's true. Well, a PBX is a private branch exchange system. In your house, you have a dial tone on your phone. If you pick that phone up, you have a dial tone and you want to call information, you would dial 555-1212, right? It just has a dial tone. All the equipment other than the phone is in the central office. There's an L-relay in the central office and you [00:33:30] put a 600 short across the line, what I call the typing ring. It pulls that relay in that gives you dial tone and then you dial out or a rotary phone, which would be pulse, okay. Then that's a regular phone.

If you have an office and you need an extension, like I want to call you, you're in the next room, so you're extension 329. The guy next to you is 331. You got a [00:34:00] four digit extension, so three digit extension. That's called a private branch exchange or it would be, they even went one step further, EAPABX, automatic private branch exchange. They got sophisticated. Then today that's it. They're gone because the technology is voice over IP and those which could be 20 feet long. They could [00:34:30] be rooms 40 feet long. When we first started, there was a thing called crossbar, which was when you dialed a number like a nine on the phone, you'd hear nine relays pull in. It was all ... it was called a step by step switch.

I never really knew them because we were taking them out, putting in electronic PBX's, but to see them, it was fascinating. They would say to the guys that worked on them could hear [00:35:00] by the sound of the switch which relay was bad. Then they would tweak it or bang it or do whatever they would do to get it to work. It's like job security, those guys. We ripped all those out and put these private branch exchanges in and that's it. It was a lot of fun.

Then, I did phones for probably 20 years, 15, 20 years with that and communications. [00:35:30] Then I went on to ... I started to get bored. I had learned, I knew how to do fiber optics. I knew most of the fields that were in the business, so I had gotten an offer from O'Kane, the superintendent of O'Kane to come over, that they had 800 men. Their company was growing. I went over to O'Kane to be an assistant super. I went over as a general foreman to start up and as the thing [00:36:00] grew, I'd become an assistant superintendent working under this fellow.

I went over there. I left Petrocelli and I went to O'Kane. We were doing spicing fiber in the streets and I was a foreman with them and so on. Then that didn't really pan out because then the whole fiber division kind of ... it was like from the dot coms that were real busy in the 90's, they called them the dot coms because that whole industry [00:36:30] kind of dried up. Then I went, I started doing electrical work for O'Kane. Then that didn't work out. This guy that was the super, they got rid of him and then I left O'Kane and I wound up at EJ, where I was working as a foreman in a ... we were building powerhouses. Then we went onto heavy construction. Yeah.

Jaime: You went from some of the smallest wires to now-

Charles S.: 22 gauge.

Jaime: [00:37:00] To now, to some of the largest equipment.

Charles S.: Right, powerhouses.

Jaime: How did you make that transition?

Charles S.: Well, it was great. Listen, because you always had the skills of doing with ... This business, like I say, you put a lot into it, you get a lot out of it, right. I had all the skills to do electrical work and I just, we just did it. It was a little rough because being inside

most of your career looking out the windows of finished office buildings, watching office buildings go up. We built them as apprentices, [00:37:30] but then you get into these buildings and you're really not doing the outdoors anymore. You're wearing a nice shirt. You're not wearing really construction clothing, like the real construction workers are wearing. Now, I'm back into that, so it was a little bit of a transition to deal with the elements and stuff.

Paul: Do you have a location or a tool that you had to use that was kind of like intimidating or ... ?

Charles S.: No. For me, no. I never was intimidated [00:38:00] by tools. I would tell people, apprentices, "You've got to be real careful with those tools, especially rotating the tools. You could do a lot of damage to yourself."

Jaime: Which tools are the most dangerous, in your opinion?

Charles S.: I've got to think the, probably the cord drilling machine or the big roto hammers because the cord drill machine's bolted to the floor. The big roto hammer, I think, is probably the most dangerous. I think most people got ... the people that I've seen that bang their hand, you're next to a wall. When you're holding a machine and the clutches [00:38:30] aren't that good. The old days, if you didn't have a lot of weight on it and it spun, it would smash your hand into the wall. I know a lot of guys broke their hands, bump their leg, hit their leg and did some damage. If not a bruise or I wouldn't say maybe a break, but would get a bruise or a cut. Jam your hand into the [inaudible 00:38:48]. I know a lot of broken hands, so I would say that the rotating hammer drills, back in the day, were probably the most dangerous [00:39:00] that I've seen.

Pulling machines, you've got to be careful with, when you pull the wire, you bolt them to the floor. We've seen them rip out of the floor, go flying. You've got to make sure. I would always tell apprentices, "Listen, when you look at something and you see something's going to let go or something's going to break, where do you think that pulling machine's going to go when it pulls out of the floor?" He say, "Well, okay. It's going to go that way." I said, "Okay, if it's going to go that way, where do you think you want to be standing?" He goes, "Over there." I go, "Yeah, all right. That's smart, see." Some people don't get it, [00:39:30] but you got to get it.

I was never intimidated by tools. I can't think, I really can't think that I was intimidated by ... I would almost like say, "Oh, I want to get into that. Let me see how that works." We did big cord drilling machines, splicing machines, [Fujitoma 00:39:49] splicing machines, pulling machines, threading machines, bending machines, all of that stuff. I was never really intimidated by [00:40:00] that.

Jaime: Inside of these generator and powerhouses, can you explain some of the equipment and some of the what do you see when you go into these places?

Charles S.: Yeah, well, we built a 550 megawatt powerhouse from the ground up. We're doing the electrical work, right, so they bring in the gas turbines, which is in essence a jet engine,

okay. They put two gas turbines in, okay. Then they, [00:40:30] the exhaust from the gas goes into a heat recovery steam generator, which is like a ten story radiator. The exhaust goes in there and it makes 2,500 pound high pressure steam that they run a steam turbine and they actually get more power than they do out of the two gas turbines. What fascinated me is how they move this stuff around.

The steam turbine was like ... [00:41:00] you know what, I ... like 250,000 tons and they couldn't lift it. They had hydraulic jacks and big five foot high I-beams. They jacked it up and they rested it on the I-beams and they jacked it up again and put another I-beam. Then jacked it again and put another I-beam until they got to the elevation they need it on. Then they rolled it into place. To see these guys do that was fascinating, to see these riggers, [00:41:30] these iron workers pull those things with the [mill rights 00:41:33] and the iron workers pull that in place. That was always fascinating. That was fascinating.

Listen, we were building, we were hooking up an eight pack welder because there's a lot of welding on these jobs, iron workers and steam fitters and stuff. We're hooking an eight pack welder up. There's three guys standing around and I'm the foreman and I'm telling two guys how to hook the welding machine up. The iron worker's about ten, yeah ten stories up, maybe 120 [00:42:00] feet in the air on a lift and he's banging a pin with the sledge hammer. He misses the pin. The sledge hammer flies out of his hand and lands like two feet from us.

Paul: Oh my God.

Charles S.: And makes a big noise and drops. Cracks that concrete and it just lands there and bounces. I go, "Ooh, well that would leave a mark." The guy, one of the mechanics calls his wife right away. The guy's crying on the phone, "Holy mackerel, I almost got killed." I said, "Listen, guy, [00:42:30] it's not your time to go. It's not your time to go." Then I pick up the sledge hammer and the guy, the iron worker comes down. The guy is white as a ghost. I go over to the guy, I go, "Here, did you drop this" as calm as can be. The guy looked at me like I was out of my mind. He expected me to probably curse at him and say, "Are you kidding me? How do you do that?" Listen, I knew it was an accident. The guy goes, "I'm sorry. I can't believe it. I'm so sorry. [00:43:00] Holy mackerel." I said, "Hey, you know, it was a happy ending there, right, so nobody got ... " But it's things like that that you just shake your head. Wasn't your time that day. I rebuilt that powerhouse. We did ...

Jaime: You walked away. From this powerhouse, did you stay with, that was with-

Charles S.: Yeah, I was with EJ. From the powerhouse, I went to sewage treatment. We went nearby. [00:43:30] We went into sewage treatment, the DEP Sewage Treatment Plant. There was a lot of waste over there, human waste that came through was combination storm and sewage that they would process. They could process 1.2 million gallons a day. If the sewer system gave them 3 million gallons, the rest of that sewage ran right into the river.

It was built in probably, I don't know when it was built. It was maybe built [00:44:00] in the 60's. We were over there in the 90's, so the thing was a real dump. They were doing a lot of renovations. I couldn't get anybody to work there. Everybody was quitting. Nobody wanted to work there because there was a lot of diseases that were there. You couldn't get AIDS because AIDS dies quick, but you could get hepatitis. You could get leptospirosis. They had a lot of bacterias there. They had a lot of things that you really didn't want.

I knew a guy that got, he was working there [00:44:30] and he got a rash on his hands. He's still got it today.

Jaime: Wow.

Charles S.: He's still got it, can't get, I don't know what it is. It's a fungus that he ... so you can't touch anything there. The seagulls land in the water, in the sewage and then they go on a handrail, so I really didn't like it. I had to ask for my money. I had said, "Listen, if you don't have anything else, I'll just as soon move along", because everybody, we couldn't get any people to work there. The business agent came down to the job and said, "Listen, [00:45:00] you guys can't quit anymore." One guys even smashed the general foreman's mirror to get thrown off the job.

Jaime: The people didn't like working there?

Charles S.: They didn't want to work there. I said, "Well, listen, if they don't want to work there, I probably don't want to work there either, so if you don't have anything, why don't you let me go?" The super of EJ said, "Charlie, do me a favor. The general foreman owes eight weeks of furlough. You replace him and he goes on furlough" because I was a foreman. I was a foreman at the powerhouse and they knew I had the talent and skills whatever. He says, " [00:45:30] Go through to September." This is like June. "Go through to like September when all the furloughs is done with this guy John and then I'll let you go." I says, "You got a deal."

By the time September comes along, I'm used to this stuff now, so it's not that bad. They would say, like the phrases that the DEP workers would say, they'd say, "It may be crap to you, but it's our bread [00:46:00] and butter."

Jaime: Yeah.

Charles S.: You know? They used another word, but they were saying this and that they worked there all day. At that time, all those guys were taking showers. The DEP workers, they'd take a shower at the end of their shift. They had special clothes that they would wash. They would do their laundry, so we were wearing special clothing that we were doing coveralls that we were washing because all the bacteria. I really didn't want it, but then September the guy let me go and [00:46:30] I also have a tractor trailer license. I had a Class A license. That was another thing that I did when I was a younger guy, drove tractor trailers.

Actually I got a tractor trailer license because my brother, when the business was slow, he bought a tractor trailer, was going east coast to west coast doing, hauling loads. He said to me, "Listen, you got to get your license so if anything ever happens to me, you can come and get my truck." I said, "That sounds like, you [00:47:00] know, we like trucks, trains and trucks." I went and I got my tractor trailer license. Now, I quit or I got laid off from EJ. I go to the Local and I go, "Okay, here's my credentials." A week later, there was like a 90 week wait for unemployment, so a week later, a guy calls me up and says, "You know, Wellsbach's calling for guys with CDL's." I says, " [00:47:30] Oh, let me call the Local. Make sure they know I got it."

I call them up. They go, "Fax me a copy of your license." I fax them a copy, so it's like, I missed two weeks of work. They called me up. They go, "You want to work for Wellsbach? It's ten hours a day. There's some digging." I go, "What do you mean there's some digging" They go, "I don't know. It's just some digging." I said, "Okay." I go over there and we're changing telephone poles, digging them out by hand. [00:48:00] I was about 50 years old at the time.

Paul: [inaudible 00:48:02] telephone poles?

Charles S.: Well, yeah. Electric poles, but we called them telephone poles, right. It's a light pole that's rotted out or whatever they got to do. You got to replace it, so you got to dig a hole next to the pole, put a new pole in, dig it by hand and put the pole in. The young guys-

Jaime: You connect all the electric?

Charles S.: Yeah. The young guys were saying, "I'm not doing that." They would quit, so the old guys, I was 50 and there's this guy, Eddie, [00:48:30] was there. He was older than me and he says, "I'm ... " I said, "I never turned a job down. Is this what they want us to do? We'll do it." He says, "Well, what do you do when you get tired?" I go, "I'll show you what you do. We throw the shovel on the floor because it's a ten foot long shovel. When you get tired, you throw the shovel on the floor and then you rest for five minutes and then we can pick the shovel up." That's what we did. I worked with them for a while and did that for a while.

Then I had mentioned to the super of Wellsbach, who I knew [00:49:00] pretty well, this guy Bobby Hughes. He knew we were making money. I ran into him and it really wasn't for me, the digging. It was heavy work and it was all these out of towners linemen. Very hazardous voltages and I would have to go through a whole other apprenticeship that I really didn't feel like doing at that point [00:49:30] and some of the other guys did that. They went through their linemen apprenticeship and they had to work and they're still doing it, but I kind of said, "If you don't have any work for me, wanted inside work, big heavy construction, I'll just move along. Give you the opportunity to ... " He goes, "Oh, yeah. I know you a long time. No problem. I'll wind up ... " He sent me as the number two on a sewage treatment plant in Manhattan that pumps sewage into Brooklyn. I [00:50:00] already had experience.

I wind up at the Manhattan pumping station for the DEP as the number two. I was there for about a year as the number two. We had about 30 men and the job was going to go a little bigger, 50, 60 men. We got a fresh water treatment plant up in Valhalla. The general foreman on the job lived on Greenwood Lake so he moved to that job and I became the general foreman on the Manhattan pump station and I was [00:50:30] there for five years after that doing sewage treatment.

Paul: People still quitting on you all the time?

Charles S.: It wasn't as bad. It wasn't as bad over there. Remember, in Astoria, at Bowery Bay that was treatment. We were just pumping sewage, so we had five, we installed five 2,500 horse power pumps, [00:51:00] 4160 voltage. We had a whole new service came in. We came with six sets of 15,000 volt service, all new, all new transformers. Six transformers converted in 15 KV to 5 KV, huge switch gear. It was all great stuff. Turbine generators, two five megawatt gas turbine generators on the roof. Two diesel black star generators. A black star generator is [00:51:30] like if the lights go out, within five seconds, the lights are back on.

Jaime: Wow.

Charles S.: It would just flicker. All the controls for all the gear had batteries, so that they didn't go out. The gear would hold into place. Motors wouldn't stop or anything like that. We worked with these variable frequency drives, for motor control, speed stuff. That was phenomenal. I still can't understand how those things work, the variable frequency drives. [00:52:00] I had an engineer that was trying to explain to me how they work. The guy, I just wouldn't ... it was just way over my head technically, but we hooked it up. We knew how to get it installed. It was just that he would do the programming and stuff.

The guy wound up, he had a mental breakdown. He was like a rocket scientist. He had a mental breakdown. He went away for two years. He was like dribbling on himself in a non-union, no overtime, in the military. Came [00:52:30] out of the military. Everything was yes, sir, no, sir. Younger than me, young guy, maybe in his mid 30's and the guy snapped. He just couldn't take it, couldn't take the pressure.

Jaime: The pressure.

Paul : You think those plants and stuff still operating?

Charles S.: Oh, yeah.

Paul: Yeah.

Charles S.: Oh, sure.

Paul: Same stuff?

Charles S.: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, it's still going on. It's still going on, yeah.

Jaime: You're no longer at the DEP?

Charles S.: No. The DEP ended. Then I went to Moynihan Station, we go onto the railroad. [00:53:00] They were reconverting the post office to retail space and Amtrak. I guess Pennsylvania Railroad built a Madison Square ... No, I'm sorry. They built the Pennsylvania Hotel and this post office over the railroad tracks, the Farley Post Office. They're going convert that. They're going to put a platform in, so they can [00:53:30] have access to the train tracks, so we worked over there. I was there for about two years. We did that. Then we went on to finish that up. It was coming along. There was about six months left on the job, so they moved me to the Brooklyn Battery Tunnel, with 120 men converting ... Sandy repair had damaged the tunnel.

Paul: How do you deal with 120 men?

Charles S.: A lot of foreman. [00:54:00] You're removed from that. You just got to have, you got a lot of foreman. Had like six buildings. The tunnel has two vent buildings in Manhattan, Governor's Island, there's a vent building and two vent buildings in Brooklyn. We had to redo all the fans and motors and services and lighting and they gutted the whole tunnel. All the lights, all the fans, the fan access, all [00:54:30] the fiber, cameras. They knocked out the catwalk. They took the whole catwalk out, put a whole new catwalk in with a nine four inch conduits, every 250 feet, a low tension splice chamber. It was phenomenal work, ripping the floors out, ripping the ... Or there's a tunnel underneath the tunnel. There's like an airspace. There's fresh air, comes in from the bottom and exhaust is from the top. It's like when you get there, you learn stuff.

[00:55:00] There's an air change every six seconds. You think about it. If you were in a traffic jam in the tunnel with carbon monoxide, all those cars there, it would kill everybody in the tunnel, right. What they do, they know when there's heavy traffic, they turn the speed of the fans up. Some of those fans, the wind could be blowing like 50, 60 miles an hour in these exhaust ducts, [00:55:30] so you've got to be careful when you go in there. You can get pulled around.

Jaime: You installed all those things?

Charles S.: We installed all of that, yeah.

Jaime: Charlie-

Charles S.: Well, it's maintained ... Yeah, we did. We installed. It's maintained by the TBTA, the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority.

Jaime: As a general foreman for 120 men, what are some of the things that you're thinking about and you're tasked with direct throughout the day?

Charles S.: Well, you're thinking about safety's an important factor that nobody gets hurt. Everybody knows what they're doing. [00:56:00] We have job hazard analysis every morning. We discuss this, we have to discuss the hazard of the day that the foreman are

required to do. We make sure that they have, like this job has an analysis. They have to go over that, whatever they're doing, core drilling or they're going to be chopping or they're going to be working near active traffic. Sometimes you work in the roadway, when one of the lanes are open, so you have [00:56:30] to be mindful that somebody ... You need a blocking vehicle, so someone doesn't come in and you can get killed. Run over by vehicles or trucks that go through there.

My primary concern was always safety first. Then of course, you've got to be productive for the contractor. You want to make the contractor as much as you can make in a safe way. We always say that we want to go home the same way. We want to leave the job the same way we got to the job, under [00:57:00] our own power. Well, you don't want to leave laying down on a gurney somewhere, so that's basically how we try to worry about getting the job done. It's a blend of production, getting the job done and people not getting injured. That's always important to me.

Jaime: How connected or disconnected are you to the details of the job?

Charles S.: Well, I particularly was very connected because any time an issue would come up, you'd have to [00:57:30] address it. The office would be involved and me, as the GF, would have to be involved in that. That's something that I particularly, I try to stay ahead of the curve on that. I would be bringing the issues that they have to my office where we have issues with work and related things like that because that affects production. If they can't do the work because something's in the way or something's or the product that we're using is not [00:58:00] suitable or something to that effect. It's got to be handled.

I try to have a pulse on the job. I think you need a pulse on it. The nuts and bolts, all the little particular nuts and bolt things, you don't get involved with too much, but everything that we install, every fastener, every nut, every device, every fitting has to be submitted and approved. You've got to make sure that the material that's sent is the material that is allowed on [00:58:30] the job. They don't want anything made outside the country. They don't want any Chinese fittings. They want all American made products. You've got to be careful of that.

Paul: [inaudible]

Charles S.: Well, that'd be the TBTA or the MTA, right. The Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority is one of the agencies owned by the MTA. The MTA runs the railroad. The MTA runs Amtrak. The MTA runs the bridges and the tunnels, the buses. The MTA's like the parent and they require [00:59:00] the products, they don't want to bring out stuff from out, from another country, so they're very quality conscious.

Jaime: Thinking about this huge career, all these contractors, running all this work, different types of work, can you reflect a little bit about what that means to you to have been able to do this work?

Charles S.: Well, to me, it was an honor [00:59:30] to be allowed to do this stuff. I got such a charge out of it that I still get. Every day I still, I love this business. When I got into this business,

I was probably 19 years old, 18, 19, 20 I guess. Yeah, I would have been 20 in July. I was just 20 because I was born in 52, got in 72, so I was just 20. At that time when we got in, you could go from 18 to 22. Past your 22nd birthday, you couldn't get in, [01:00:00] unless you were in the army or the navy or had armed services.

Jaime: [inaudible 01:00:03].

Charles S.: Yeah, I was in at 20. I had made a commitment to myself then that this is a business. This is not like you're working in the supermarket. This is a career and I really loved it. I was excited about it. I've been doing it like that ever since. I really get so much out of it, especially the bigger the projects, the more convoluted or the more stressful it is and stuff like [01:00:30] that, how can you do it, that's what I love... doing that stuff. People can say, "Gee, how could you stay so calm when you're doing it?" I say, "Well, when you get nervous, you get nervous, you get you nervous."

I had a project manager. We were moving a trading floor. All the equipment out of a room into the elevator. You had to move it to the elevator lobby and then we got to put new equipment in it. I had a project manager who called me to the, had me called to the office as a conference saying that I'm not nervous enough. [01:01:00] The super calls me up and says, "You've got to come to the office. We're having a meeting." I go, "You're going to have to give me a heads up what the meeting's about." He goes, "Ah, I'll tell you when you get here." I says, "No, you're going to tell me before I get there." He said, "Well, Melissa says you're not nervous enough." I go, "Because she doesn't know what she's doing and I know what I'm doing, so she's nervous. She's stuttering." Hold on a second.

I went in and I was [01:01:30] like, it was amazing that she was complaining that I was too calm. I always had that ability to just be calm and address the things as they need to be addressed. I loved it and I still love doing it. I still love the way the projects go.

Paul: Did you take work home with you?

Charles S.: You know, I'd like to say, "No, I don't", but there's some times, there's been occasions [01:02:00] when I ... if there's something that I don't have an answer to or it's, "Gee, we don't know how we're going to resolve this issue" or something. Sometimes I lay in bed at night, I come up with solutions or things like that, but it never was enough, it never got me where I was frazzled or I was out of it, I'm out of my mind with frustration. I would say that occasionally it would come home with me, but I [01:02:30] wouldn't say ... Even if it did, it wouldn't be the worst thing. If I'd have items that I'd have to go over or resolve or figure out, we'd come up with that. I guess, I'd like to say, "No, I don't. At the end of the day, I can just leave it." For the most part, I would do that, but occasionally you would have to think about things.

There was one time I was working at [01:03:00] Rockefeller Center and Lawrence Rockefeller calls us up. He's got a model of his yacht on a big base, probably the base was probably as big as this table. Let's say five feet by three feet. It's a six inch base and on the front of the base was a little button. You'd push the button and all the lights

would go on this yacht. It was a big sailing yacht. Thing was probably three and a half feet high. It had sails and windows. [01:03:30] You look in the boat and there's little lamps in there, tables and stuff. He says, "When I push the button, the lights don't come on anymore." That was pretty cool. It had a picture of an island that the Rockefeller's owned where the boat was on the wall. We're looking and we're looking. I said, "I don't know. Why don't we look underneath and see what's ... there's no cord on this thing, right?"

Believe it or not, we moved the boat. We turned the boat on the table that it's on, so we can look underneath and there [01:04:00] were two D batteries in there, makeshift, like with masking tape taped there for the lights. We changed the batteries and the lights worked. You pushed the button and the lights worked.

Paul: [inaudible 01:04:16]

Charles S.: Yeah, that was pretty cool. Another time was probably the most stress I ever had on the job. I'm going to tell you that I learned a lot from these phone guys. When the system was down, [01:04:30] they call the repairmen to come in. Now if you have no phones on a trading floor, you could only imagine what those people, how they handled it. These guys were so calm. They would just say, "Listen, if you want to talk to me. I'll talk to you." They'd say, "When's it going to be fixed?" The guy said, "I just walked in the door. I have to look at it. I'll let you know when it's going to be fixed, but I know when it's going to be fixed. I know you're upset." They never got flustered.

[01:05:00] I think that's what rubbed off on me or I learned that. Listen, he could be nervous and do whatever he's got to do or not. That's what they did. They did their repairs. We worked in [Deke Carara's 01:05:13] office. Deke Carara's was money changes on Broadway. Mr. Deke had buttons and buzzers on the phone, where you go buzz, buzz, you buzz the secretary, she comes in. He wanted them installed on his phones. [01:05:30] We had to do it at between 8 and 9:00. We started at 8:00 in the morning then. I remember the guy's name, Artie [Brivocal 01:05:37] was the telephone man and I was going in with him to set these buttons and buzzers up. The secretary comes in and says, "It's five to nine. You have to be done by 9:00." He says, "Well, I might as well leave right now then because I'm not going to be done by 9:00." She says, "Well, what do you mean?"

He says, "Well, there's other work we got to do and it's not going to be done. If [01:06:00] you keep talking to me, it's just more time." Now, the guy walks in the office. She says, "I told them they got to be out." He says, "Yes, relax." He goes, "Relax, little lady. They'll be all right." He let us finish the buttons and buzzers. We got done at 8:15, 8:20, whatever it was. Then we walked out and went and did whatever else we did that day, but [01:06:30] the way the guy was so calm, not getting flustered was something, I think, that helped me in my later years.

Jaime: I want to congratulate you on this career [inaudible 01:06:44].

Charles S.: Well, thank you.

Jaime: Of all these years and I'm proud of you and I'm just thinking about your career and it puts everything into a little perspective. What advice would you give somebody [01:07:00] starting out in your field?

Charles S.: In the business?

Jaime: Hmm-hmm(affirmative).

Charles S.: I would say that to me, you get out of this what you put in to it. I've taught apprentices safety. I've taught apprentices basic wiring and I always say to them, "Listen, when I came in, I was eager to learn this business" and I would hope that they're that eager too. [01:07:30] Some apprentices you see, they have that drive to learn and understand this business and be the best they can be and others just come to just put their time in and not be like the best that they can be. They just do the minimum. That's what I would say is that embrace the business and learn the business and get out of it what [01:08:00] you ... put a lot of effort into it.

Jaime: [inaudible 01:08:02]

You were saying something about college?

Charles S.: Yeah. One of the things that I guess they can never take away from you is your education. When I started the apprenticeship, you didn't have to go to college. You did apprenticeship school. Then Harry Van Arsdale Junior had somehow felt that we should go learn about labor, so we [01:08:30] had a labor college. The new apprentices coming in, I guess in the late 70's, they started going to college and then when they graduated their apprenticeship, they would have an associate's degree in labor studies.

Sal [Brozizi 01:08:46] was the president of one of the borough clubs, the [Bets all 01:08:51] Kingsborough Club and Harry said to Sal, "Wouldn't it be nice if this club went [01:09:00] to college?" He tapped about 30 guys on the shoulder and we all went back to college.

Jaime: You were one of the first ones to go back to college [inaudible 01:09:10]?

Charles S.: We graduated with the first class at Columbia University. I graduated it was us, the Bets All Kingsborough Club with our associate's, John Marshall, who's the president of Local 3 today was in my class, Brian McClachlan, who was the president of the Central Labor Council [01:09:30] was in the class. Sal Brozizi, Davie Goldberg, yeah. A lot of people.

Jaime: What were the topics that you were discussing in these college classes?

Charles S.: Well, labor. It was organized labor. How labor started in this country, the Knights of Labor, you would study the Knights of Labor. You would study Samuel Gompers that he was a cigar roller, [01:10:00] the Cigar Rollers Union and they would read to each other. Everybody would make up so many cigars because they had to do a certain amount of cigars, so they would read about labor. The secret meetings they had, how labor in this

country and the Industrial Revolution, railroads, Railway Act. I think it's important that our members learn that. We wound up getting an associate's degree in 82 and then we wound up getting our bachelor's degrees [01:10:30] in 84.

Jaime: [inaudible 01:10:31].

Charles S.: We did. Yeah, we did. To me, I'm the first member of my whole family that has a college degree, all my cousins, the females and the males. We were born in the 50's and 60's and the 40's. Nobody has a degree. I'm the only one with a bachelor's degree. My son has his doctorate now. That's, I'm so proud of that. [01:11:00] Education, getting back to what you were saying, I guess education and understanding this business, be educated on what's going around you.

Jaime: Can you tell me, you spoke about the borough club. The way I met you was Local 3 ski club.

Charles S.: Okay.

Jaime: Can you tell me about your goal in the Local 3 ski club and some of your activities with the club?

Charles S.: Yeah, well, the Local 3 Ski Club, we were involved ... This fellow by the name of Bill [Beckoe 01:11:29] skied with a [01:11:30] ski club. They would meet in this guy's backyard and they would decide or he would decide, this fellow Charlie where they're going to go this year. They would get 20 or 30 families or husband, it wasn't a kids club. It was adults. Then he'd say we're going to go away. We get a discount and he called themselves whatever they called themselves. I don't even know what, the Charlie Pallod Club. Then they would go to a provider and they would go on a trip.

Billy thought [01:12:00] it would be a great idea that we could do that with Local 3, so we went to his brother who was a business agent and he went to the boss, who was Tom Van Arsdale and he got the nod that we could do that. We were like founding officers of the ski club and we came in and we started the ski club. The first trip we went to was Bormeo. It was the year after 9/11 was our first trip. We've been doing it ever since.

Jaime: [01:12:30] Can you tell me about some of the relationships that you've built within the club and how that translates to your job?

Charles S.: Yeah. The relationships I think are more on a personal note. We work with these guys on a job. Sometimes it becomes a little touchy because you become friends with people that come to work for you and they're not necessarily what you'd like to have as a worker. Maybe there's an entitlement there. [01:13:00] Sometimes there's been issues with that I've had where you got to try to take these guys on the side and say, "Come on. You've got to produce a little bit." The relationships that I've come up with over the years have been all good. Maybe once or twice that's happened to me where people that worked for me were in the club that I was friends with I had issue. We were able to

resolve that. I think it's all good. Most of the people are good [01:13:30] in the club and the union. Most of the people that we run across, this is our business. It's a brotherhood. We look out for each other in a sense. I would say that 99% of the people, I think, feel that way with that.

Jaime: In the interest of time, I only have one more question for you. Charlie, what inspires you?

Charles S.: What inspires me? Well, [01:14:00] in regards to work?

Jaime: Whatever comes to you first.

Charles S.: Yeah. I'm inspired by ... I don't know, life. I'm just inspired by life itself. My family, my children, I'm inspired by them. Just inspired by activities, the business. The business inspires me. My family inspires me, friends, the enthusiasm that people have inspire me.

Jaime: [01:14:30] Is there anything that you have that you wanted to add or did you want to ask us?

Charles S.: No. To me, I think that I'm a very lucky man. Living in the city, I've got immigrant parents that came over here. I don't think they ever thought that we would ever be as successful as we were, coming here. It gives me great pleasure to know that the effort that I put into my life and family and [01:15:00] the business and my personal and private life throughout the years has been so successful and rewarding and the people that I've helped. People that work for me on the job, if I see a guy that looks like he's out of step or something, I'll take the guy in the side. I'll say, "Is something that matter with you?" Maybe the guy's drinking too much or he's got family issues.

The foremen that I worked for when I was younger, they would always have that ... I wouldn't say all of them, but a lot of them would have that [01:15:30] perception and they truly cared for a brother and they would look out and say, "Gee, can I help you with anything?" I try to take that on and do that with people. If I see people, they look like they're out of step, I'll ask you what the problem is and stuff like that.

Jaime: Do you have anything else for Charlie?

Paul: The passing down a tool.

Jaime: Oh. Have you ever passed down a tool or had a tool passed down to you?

Charles S.: Well, I have [01:16:00] a lot of tools. I still have my father's plumbing tools that are home. I say to the kids, "Listen, these are tools that we got." He had a canvas tool ... If you know what a bit and brace is, right?

Jaime: No, I don't.

Charles S.: Okay. A bit and brace, it's a tool. It's got an arm on the back, like this and it goes like this. There's a handle here, right. You would put a [inaudible 01:16:25] bit in that, all right, and then you'd push it and you'd go like this.

Jaime: [01:16:30] Spin it around.

Charles S.: You would drill a hole in wood.

Jaime: Oh, wow.

Charles S.: That's called a bit and the brace is the thing you turn. Now my father, when I was a little kid, he had this bag, a canvas bag that if you snapped the thing and all the tools, the bits were in the bag and the brace was the handle. It's the coolest thing, right? You'd open it up and there's all these different size bits for plumbing work to go through. That was handed down to me and all the threading. [01:17:00] I can remember threading pipe in a house in Brentwood at four years old. He was putting heat in the house and I was, I don't know, how much does a four year old weigh? 30 pounds? Maybe I was five years old or six. I was hanging on. I was probably five. I wanted to help them thread the pipe, so I was threading a piece of one inch pipe or three quarter inch pipe and it's the ratchet stock. I was hanging on it.

After we got two or three [01:17:30] threads, so I'm hanging on it, I don't have enough weight to continue the threading. They'd say, "All right. Stand on the side", then they would do that. All those tools were handed down.

Jaime: You still have them?

Charles S.: I have all that stuff. Then caulking, if you look at lead bell and spigot waste lines, they would take hot lead and they'd put oakum in the joint. Then they would put hot lead in there. It was like 20 different chisels [01:18:00] that they would caulk the lead with and caulk the oakum with. I got a whole set of those. Every time plumbers see them, they want to buy them because they're all different and they're all hard to come by. I don't even know if they're available anymore because you don't see that stuff much, but it's just stuff that people leave you that aren't around anymore that you look at and it makes you smile, that [01:18:30] you have that. Just dust collectors, but there's some emotional or sentimental value there with that tools. I guess the kids, my kids, I think, feel the same way I do that as the time goes on, they'll get, have them too.

We have a thing that we do. My brother had a rigid 300, which is a threading machine that he had bought years and years [01:19:00] ago. Now, if you're going to do any plumbing work and you have to thread pipe, it's so much easier to do with an electric machine than it is to do by manual, right. We have this rule. Whoever needs the machine, that's who has to keep it until the next guy needs it because nobody wants it. Nobody wants it in their garage. Nobody wants it in their house.

Jaime: Who has it now?

Charles S.: My son-in-law has it in his house in Oceanside. Whoever needs it, that's who gets stuck with it. [01:19:30] That's pretty funny when you think about it.

Jaime: I guess nobody needs it for a long time.

Charles S.: Yeah, hopefully not. I don't need it.

Paul : Cool.

Jaime: Very good, Charlie. I'm going to thank you again for [crosstalk 01:19:43].

Charles S.: It was my pleasure. I feel honored that you would have an interest in my career.

Jaime: I think that we need a few more hours to try to write down all the things that you've done really. This doesn't do it justice.

Charles S.: Thank you so much. It's my pleasure. Nice meeting you.

Paul: Very nice to meet you.

Charles S.: [01:20:00] My pleasure.